

Sermon for Epiphany 7c  
February 20, 2022  
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Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church  
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Genesis 45:3-11, 15  
Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42  
1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50  
Luke 6:27-38

This is an unusual Sunday – The Seventh Sunday after The Epiphany. It’s unusual because the season after The Epiphany usually ends at the fourth, fifth and sometimes the sixth Sunday after The Epiphany. It’s usually Lent by now.

I’d actually written a sermon earlier this week looking at the Gospel and remarking on the difficulty of loving your enemies and those who abuse you.

I remembered an example of caring for your enemies from the Hindu-language film, *Kesari*. Kesari is the name of a fort on the border between British-colonial India and Afghanistan during the 1897 Afghani uprising. It’s the story of 21 Sikh soldiers of the British Indian Army fighting against 10,000 Jihadis.

As the soldiers prepare for battle, the Afghani cook approaches the Sikh sergeant in charge to volunteer to join in the upcoming fight.

The sergeant challenges him to a more formidable task – to give water to the wounded.

The cook asks “to our wounded?”

“To all the wounded, ours and theirs,” the sergeant tells him.

“Why would I give water to the enemy?”

The sergeant puts his hand on his shoulder:

“You see an enemy fallen. I see a man who is thirsty.”

It is a story of seeing the humanity even in those who would kill you. But then the story of Joseph from the Old Testament lesson also is a perfect example of what Jesus is saying.

Here you have Joseph, the spoiled brat who is Jacob’s favorite son, tattling on his brothers, rubbing their noses in his specialness. For those of you who remember the TV series, *Leave It to Beaver*, Joseph was more like Eddie Haskell than Beaver or Wally.

Some brothers wanted him dead, but others prevailed and he’s sold into slavery. As it works out, he grows into a better man, forgives his brothers and saves his family and people, as well

as the nation of Egypt and the surrounding countryside. It's an excellent story and exemplifies what Jesus is teaching.

Even the Psalm is an instructional treatise focusing on what we can do and not to dwell on the fact of evil doers and wrongs committed, but to live into the assurance of what God wills for our lives.

But that still leaves Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians and the question of the resurrection – what comes next? It's a question I have often thought about, particularly as I grow older – I turn 75 next week. It occurred to me this week, pondering the lessons, so I felt a need to dig deeper for something more. So please bear with me.

Too often we read Paul as saying: "Body Bad! – Spirit Good!"

Contemplating Paul's words, I immediately thought of what Jesus said in John 12:24:

"Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

And those words seem to fit with what Paul writes:

"What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body."

Paul was a Christ-inspired Apostle. I believe he was given special insights, very likely in the visions he refers to in his second letter to the Corinthians (12:2)

"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows."

It occurred to me that the seed, the grain, Jesus and Paul refer to might actually be the human soul.

"So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body."

I recently encountered the work of German theologian Reinhard Hütter concerning the nature of the afterlife in his book *Bound for Beatitude*. I've heard it before, but Hütter relates that the human soul is implanted by God. It is not a function of the biological pairing, but something more than physicality.

God's role in the formation of the human soul is apparent in the calling of the Prophet Jeremiah. (1:5)

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

These words tell us that we are formed by God. Our physical body might be a product of biological procreation, but who we are to God, our souls, are there by divine act.

As Paul writes:

“Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual.”

So if we are so implanted with a soul, how does that affect what we read in the Scriptures?

In Genesis 2, the second creation story, we have God molding the earth into human form and planting and cultivating a garden – Eden. God as a gardener. I don't think it's a coincidence that in the story of the Easter in the Gospel of John as Jesus stands at the threshold of his resurrection that Jesus is mistaken for the gardener.

As the divine gardener God works through each of us and plants within us a divine spark – a soul. It's a small bit of divinity, but as we grow into the knowledge of God through Christ and read the Scriptures, we nurture our soul with the sustenance of the Word.

The lessons Jesus feeds us incrementally to teach us how we are to live: In today's Gospel, the lesson comes starkly:

“If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. ... love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

As we live into the lessons we are given, our souls are nurtured for greater growth toward God and fed with the Communion of the Eucharist.

It is NOT Body Bad – Soul Good. Our bodies are the en-fleshed reality of our being. Our bodies are necessary to feed and grow the Soul.

Just as plants rise from the soil of the earth and turn toward the warmth of the sun, so as they grow our souls turn ever more readily to the light of the Son of God.

As Paul writes:

“The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

We are called to grow into whom we are to become. We are called to become who we were formed by God in the womb to be born to be. Our souls beg to be fed with the divine nutrients that promote spiritual growth.

When I talked with the men and women I met in the cancer unit at Presbyterian Hospital in Albuquerque during my summer of Clinical Pastoral Education, the question would come up: what comes next? My answer was always, “I don’t know, but I believe there is something.”

I believe we are called to nurture our souls with our lives and our interactions and relationships with others.

As I pondered these lessons the past week, something evolved in my thinking. Paul seems to be prophesying the physical body is replaced with a spiritual body, the soul, which grows into the purposes for which we were created – to inhabit the Kingdom of God for divine purposes about which we know little.

But that is our mortal promise, according to Paul:

“What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

As we prayed in today’s Collect:

O Lord, you have taught us that without love whatever we do is worth nothing: Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts your greatest gift, which is love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whoever lives is accounted dead before you. Grant this for the sake of your only Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

So Remember, if nothing else. Love your body and care for it and you will be nourishing your soul.

So: Body Good – Spirit Better.

Amen!